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ABSTRACT

Currently, the question is how the best of human values can be instilled in young people living in the midst of a mobile, media-bombarded, and changing society. Predictably, about every 20 years, the same challenge of teaching values or the virtues of human character is laid at the door of the school. The new "Partnership in Character Education Pilot Projects" awarded to the Departments of Education of 10 states provide the opportunity to design and pilot long-term character education projects. Knowledge from the fields of human development and social psychology enlightens the character education challenge. Human behavior is a product of the interaction of the person with an environment. Children who live in caring families demonstrate more confidence than those living in neglectful homes. Moreover, behavior changes when the environment is changed. Thousands of schools that have been re-culturing their school environments with the caring community process known as the Tribes Learning Community (TLC) indicate outcomes that support using this character education approach. Respect for social and cultural diversity increases, discipline problems decrease, students demonstrate greater participation, cooperation, and kindness. This year the Tribes Learning Community process was recognized by "The President's Initiative on Race, One America in the 21st Century" as a "promising practice to build a more just and more united American community, offering opportunity and fairness for all Americans." TLC process components are outlined. Contains 6 references. (BT)

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Internalizing Character Education Values By Living and Learning Within A Caring School Community

By Jeanne Gibbs

The issues of character and civility are not merely esoteric or an add-on to the curriculum, like driver's education. They are central to our mission and to our very survival as an institution and a society.

—Paul D. Houston

Respect, responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, empathy, justice, fairness, civic participation/service, kindness, integrity, work ethic, caring social skills? What would you and your school community add to the list of qualities to transform the character of today's youth and thus American society? How can these best of human virtues be instilled in young people living in the midst of our mobile, media bombarded, and changing society? Once again, predictably about every twenty years, the same challenge of teaching (or preaching) values or the virtues of human character is laid at the door of the school. Will schools create one more content curriculum for teachers to teach, for parents to debate, for the community to evaluate...and perhaps discard?

The new "Partnership in Character Education Pilot Projects" awarded to the Departments of Education of ten States (Improving America's Schools Act, Title X), provide the opportunity to design and pilot long-term character education projects. Hopefully, the projects will go beyond exhorting, measuring and rewarding compliance to a selected list of character education values. Informational curriculum, such as we used in years of attempts to prevent alcohol/drug use, cannot be expected to instill exemplary new behavior.

What goes by the name of character education nowadays is, for the most part, a collection of exhortations and extrinsic inducements designed to make children work harder and do what they are told.... The point is to drill students in specific behaviors rather than to engage them in deep critical reflection about certain ways of being.

—Alfie Kohn

Before launching a school-based character education effort, one question needs to be asked: Do we know at all how human character values (virtues) can become internalized as lasting behaviors in children's lives and society? Now we're not just talking about education, but human development!

Knowledge from the field of human development and social psychology enlightens the character education challenge. Let's begin with one salient fact: Human behavior is a product of the interaction of the person in an environment. For example, most people act differently when walking down a lonely dark street than when in a well lit populated one. Children who live in caring families demonstrate more confidence than those living in neglectful homes. Moreover, behavior changes when the environment is changed. Thus it becomes obvious that lasting character values for behavior can not be taught as a conceptual curriculum, but are instilled from the culture of the school. The impact of building caring environments for children's development and learning has been well proven. Dr. Eric Schaps of the Developmental Studies Center writes:

Our recent intervention study with six school districts across the United States that succeeded in building community (environment) improved students' civic, social and ethical outcomes...Community building in school is much like the process by which most Americans once believed virtue developed in an entire citizenry.

Thousands of schools, who have been re-culturing their school environments with the caring community process known as "Tribes," indicate outcomes that support using this character education approach. Respect for social and cultural diversity increases, discipline problems decrease, students demonstrate greater participation, cooperation and kindness. A recent report from a Wisconsin district also highlights improvement in academic achievement over time. In addition, this year the Tribes Learning Community process was recognized by *The President's Initiative on Race, One America in the 21st Century*, as "a promising practice to build a more just and more united American community, offering opportunity and fairness for all Americans."

Given that all behavior is conditioned by environment, it is important to recognize that building a caring environment is an on-going process that must be based upon clear agreements (norms) for behavior, social skills and reflection. Within a Tribes school students and teachers reflect many times a day upon caring human qualities and interactions while working together on classroom academics and other school activities. The norms of the positive learning environment embrace and quickly develop valued character qualities. This type of learning is intrinsic and lasting. The on-going process (Tribes Learning Community) is a meaningful way to move beyond just imposing one more curriculum for teachers to do! The chart on the following page illustrates how the Tribes process instills many of the values of character education.

The Tribes process is soundly based on more than 1,050 studies on cooperative learning, brain-compatible learning, resiliency, school climate and human development. Attached is a short listing of articles and studies to give readers of this topical paper background knowledge on the effectiveness of social group learning. A complete list of references may be found in the book, *Tribes, A New Way of Learning and Being Together* (Gibbs, Jeanne, CenterSource Systems, 1995).

The *Tribes* book guides teachers to integrate academic content into the participatory group learning process through 168 strategies. Trained teachers note two objectives for each lesson plan. The first is "What will we learn (academics)," and the second is "How will we work together? (collaborative skill or quality). After the learning experience students are asked to evaluate by reflecting, discussing or writing about both objectives. As Alfie Kohn believes, the point is not to drill students in specific behaviors but "to engage them in deep critical reflection about certain ways of being." It is the repeated practice of working with and connecting supportively to others that moves a young person from an isolated focus on "me" to an altruistic concern for others and society.

The list of character values so desperately needed now within young people are the human values of honorable and caring civilizations. Translating the values into common norms of behavior requires much more than stacks of curricula lessons. It requires an on-going process of reflection on interactions within the classroom/school community, learning groups and examples that students themselves discover within literature, history and daily events. One of the most fundamental elements of the "Tribes Learning Community" process does this by taking the time to reflect upon helpful behaviors and qualities as they happen moment-by-moment. Moreover, as families of the school learn how to create the same caring culture and process of living together, they too will have a way to support the development of the essential qualities of character.

Tribes TLC® Instills the Values of Character Education

CHARACTER VALUES

Caring and Compassion

Responsibility

Justice and Fairness

Trustworthiness

Honesty

Doing One's Personal Best

Social Skills

TRIBES PROCESS COMPONENTS

Four caring Agreements are used:

- Listen with the heart as well as head
- Express appreciation/ no put-downs
- Mutual respect (for others, the school and environment)
- The right to pass within a peer group

- Students maintain membership in small groups (tribes) to support learning and positive social behavior.
- Teachers use cooperative learning methods for academics, transfer responsibility to students to help each other.
- All members are responsible to each other and for group accountability.

- Time is taken to reflect on tribe member's work, special qualities and skills after every group task.
- Equal participation, fairness, open and honest communication is acknowledged.
- Group issues and conflict are mediated within the peer group.
- Teacher observations, instruction and modeling support the cooperation with the tribes.

- Peer support, respect and appreciation built with the tribes and classroom enables students and teachers to know each other well and count upon the affirmed individual virtues repeatedly cited throughout every day.

- Repeated use of reflection and feedback (processing) by peers develops a high level of candor and honesty. The sense of belonging (inclusion) facilitates speaking the truth.

- Setting goals, completing tasks on time, respecting others, living responsibly and loving learning becomes the norm.
- Hundreds of cooperative learning studies have proven that students work more diligently on task and excel academically when in caring groups than individually.

The Tribes process is recognized as a very successful cooperative learning model because it teaches and gives daily practice to important individual and team building skills:

Participate fully
Listen attentively
Express appreciation
Reflect on learning experiences
Value diversity of cultures/ ideas
Think constructively
Make responsible decisions
Resolve conflict
Solve problems creatively
Work collaboratively on task
Assess improvement
Celebrate achievement

What the exact qualities *are* may not be as important as how to involve students themselves in discovering and owning them within themselves. Indeed, an abundance of research and common sense tells us... this time we're not just talking about education, but human development!

We may never figure out how to measure levels attained in honesty or kindness, except through students self assessments, fewer youth problems, and healthier, happier, successful kids. It's worth taking a different path this time. It's worth considering transforming school environments so that finally education includes calling forth the innate virtues inherent in all human beings.

Yes, the how-to human development process is simply called... "Tribes."

We, as educators, must find that balance between the world of the mind and that of the heart and soul. It is the mind that preoccupies our time and that will take us to the information age. But it is the heart and soul that will allow us to remain connected to our own humanity, that will build that bridge between us...and create a good society.

—Paul D. Houston

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